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# THE SCHOOL REVIEW

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## PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING THE MAKING OF COURSES OF STUDY FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS<sup>1</sup>

ONE who sets out to fix the metes and bounds of a secondary curriculum soon finds that conditions are changing with modern rapidity. If he devoutly wish that an assignment of the subject had been deferred ten years, he may also congratulate himself that he was not called upon ten years sooner.

Our subject falls easily into three divisions: articulation, values, and time limits.

On the side touching higher education, the closing years of the old century are clearing away many perplexities. The necessity of ransacking the catalogues and writing the registrars of a dozen different institutions, that no scrap of preparation may be overlooked, has been obviated, in part at least, by agreement and by large sectional associations representing both departments of education, and putting forth common requirements in some of the more perplexing subjects. In all probability, the number of these associations will increase. They will cover the entire country, and will include all subjects. They will recognize one another's requirements. National committees are also at work whose findings will gain wide acceptance. While it is yet too early to say that we are ready to trust our individual, our local, and our sectional preferences to the mercy of one great syndicate, it is clear that conference will follow conference, and that, be it for freedom or be it for cramping, entrance requirements are on the rapid road toward national uniformity. On this side of the question, then, there is every

<sup>1</sup>Paper by GEO. B. AITON, Inspector of State High Schools for Minnesota, read at the Joint Session of the Michigan Schoolmasters' Club and Classical Conference at Ann Arbor, April 1, 1898. See p. 458.

reason to expect a large-minded treatment of the secondary curriculum.

On the other side—the side that touches the people—the opening years of the new century, while relieved of the perplexities mentioned, will usher in a larger problem than we have hitherto worked at. Ten years ago we had about one-fourth of a million students in secondary work; ten years hence, if present factors continue in operation, we shall have an enrollment of over one million and a quarter. The growth of all departments of education, except rural, has been exceedingly gratifying; the growth of secondary education is phenomenal. Now this remarkable growth is due, in the main, to a sudden expansion of our public high-school system, and brings into prominence two conditions of increasing consequence to our discussion. First, a popular or non-preparatory enrollment, and second, popular control. Notwithstanding a great increase in the attendance at institutions of higher education, the present percentage of secondary students preparing for college has fallen to 18 per cent. of our total enrollment and does not seem likely to rise. Indeed, the percentage of high-school students who are preparatory is rated at only 14 per cent. This means that over four-fifths of the students for whom we would arrange courses of study are attending with a purpose, so far as they have any, different from that for which academies and, for that matter, high schools, were originally established. Multiplicity of aims is then the first consequence of popular enrollment, and brings into issue with increasing pertinacity the question of majority and minority rights, and the whole subject of educational values.

The second consequence of our growth is equally important. Popular control means that secondary schools, started for a particular purpose, intermediate between the common school and the college, between the graded school and the university, have widened in scope until they are regarded by the people as an important semi-terminal part of the public school system, subject to popular management, and calling for a corresponding enlargement of our plans and ideas of secondary organization.

Here, then, is our problem. We shall soon have a round million of young people in secondary schools. We desire to retain the best traditions of the past; we desire to win laurels in the preparation of students for advanced study; we desire our best influence and our best effort to go with the overwhelming majority immediately into the life

of the community. We *must* have the respect of the educated ; we *must* retain the confidence of the public. These apparently conflicting purposes may be reconciled in one way, and only one. I give you this as our first principle. *Whatever is truly best for the people is best for the school, and ultimately best for higher education.* The converse is also true. Whatever is best for higher education is best for the school, and ultimately best for the people, but the second proposition is more difficult to maintain. The real interests of the common school, the high school, and the university, the academy and the college, are identical. What these interests are cannot be determined by pure reason. The principles of education, like all principles of sociology, are matters of opinion. They are our deliberate judgments, strengthened and buttressed by experience.

In forming courses of study, the persistent preferences of any considerable portion of the community should be recognized, each in its appropriate place and course. Within the limits of their resources, higher institutions should give these subjects and these courses equal recognition ; and conversely, all secondary courses should be preparatory courses. However they may differ in subject-matter, secondary courses should agree in length, number of subjects, and, so far as is possible with differing material, in intensity. So far as curriculum goes, the difference between a large school and a small one should be a difference in the number of courses. The one course of a small school in a village should be quite the same in extent, vigor, and suggestiveness, as the corresponding course in the large schools of a metropolis. The poverty stricken, scraggly course leading nowhere, has no rational place, and is of small service to the people. Once the universities base their requirements on limits of time and substance, and reduce the number of subjects required for entrance to all courses to a retreating minimum, the best interests of the people require that all courses be preparatory. No subject with insufficient nutriment to develop an advanced student has sufficient nutriment to develop a citizen and a member of society. No such subject has a rightful place in the school of the people. Any subject possessing real quality to develop a young person may well be recognized for entrance by our colleges and universities. Theoretically, then, we brush away all conflict of interest between the people and institutions of higher learning ; practically, we must recognize and give play to divergence of views, leaving to time the decision between courses.

Having extended the American doctrine of equal suffrage to subjects and courses, it by no means follows that all courses and all subjects have equal value, or that there is no orderly sequence. Indeed, one of the three propositions upon which the science of education finally rests, is that subjects have unequal educational value, but it is sufficient for our present purpose to proceed on the assumption that each subject or group of subjects has educational value of a particular kind. I think that as in the case of permanent identity of interest between the people and institutions of higher learning, we may also see certain relations between learning and the learner, so evidently permanent as to rise in their statement to the dignity of principles underlying the making of courses of study for secondary schools.

Arranging the subjects usually taught in secondary schools in six convenient groups, we shall have the following: literature, language—I separate the two for a purpose—literature, language, history, including its usual associates, science, mathematics, and the industrial arts. This arrangement is, of course, arbitrary; Greek and Latin, for instance may be regarded as literature, as language, or as science, and they even trench on the province of history; but this grouping is not likely to lead to confusion.

Of all subjects, literature should clearly have first place. Bearing in mind that outside reading may so readily be secured, I do not suppose that literature needs a large share of time; but if I may lay down one rule dogmatically, it is that literature should have a continuous and prominent position in every course of study. Not an affected gossip and chatter about authors and books, but, as John Morley puts it, “a sincere and living interest in the thoughts, the feelings, the moods, the ideas, the principles, which it is the business of literature to build up in our minds and characters.” In an enlightened people native literature should lead. French for France, German for Germany, and English for English-speaking peoples. Of all the arts, literature is native, indigenous; but as foreign architecture, music, painting, and sculpture become auxiliary and stimulating, so our study of foreign literature ought to be so shaped as to give the greatest possible impulse to an interest in and understanding of our own literature. I think that we ought to attach the greatest importance to the literary influence of the passages and works chosen for study and translation.

Literature is essential; language is only necessary. We have known people who could neither read nor write so familiar with the

good thought and motive of literature, especially biblical, that they were respected and in their way influential. In this sense literature is essential. In the sense that language opens the way to all the other groups, even in part to the industrial arts, language is a necessity. A discussion of this group is a delicate subject. But, aside from the value of foreign literatures and the number of foreign languages in the secondary school, and wholly independent of whether we have two ancient and one modern, or one ancient and one modern, or two modern, or one ancient, or one modern tongue, there is certainly one principle which holds good in the making of all courses. It is like all Gaul in this respect, that it may be divided into three parts:

1. The study of foreign languages is requisite to a mastery of our own.
2. Foreign languages should be made strictly auxiliary.
3. Foreign languages should assume a full share of the entire responsibility which rests on the language group.

How language shall be studied ages hence, when that tongue best fitted to commercial purposes shall have become universal, and all foreign languages have become ancient, we cannot say; but the languages in which the infancy of literature was cradled will always be fundamental. Growth, evolution, development, will be subjects of investigation. Comparison must ever be the basis of measure, of judgment.

Probably less than two per cent. of the students now in secondary work will utilize foreign languages to reach sources of information otherwise inaccessible. The special function of foreign languages in a secondary course is to give the young student a fit mastery of interpretation and expression. Looking over the four courses of study recommended by the Committee of Ten, we find that, after crediting a part of the Greek, Latin, French, and German to literature, and making some allowance for training in scientific thought, there still remains an expenditure of from one and one-half to four times as great on foreign languages as is spent on the English language. If we accept these courses, it is manifestly fair that foreign languages should bear a large part of the responsibility which falls on the language group. It is manifestly unfair and unwise to restrict the English language to a comparatively few points, and then hold it entirely responsible for the lack of results.

The present illiteracy of pupils applying for admission to college is unendurable. The inefficiency of those who go elsewhere or stay at

home may be inferred. It is incumbent upon the language group, not simply upon English, but upon the whole group, to yield better results, or to give away for a reorganization on a different basis. The truth is, our text-books and our instructors in all languages ought to be more alert to the responsibility of teaching young people to grasp the thought of discourse, and to express it in idiomatic modern English. Of course, other groups owe the language group assistance, but they cannot be held responsible. So far as the writer of this paper has been able to think around this many-sided question, he is of the opinion that in secondary schools the dignified and true attitude of the foreign languages to English should be: "We enjoy your hospitality, we aim to render an equivalent; when you need our room, let us know. We are glad to be of service; we believe that we are of service; we believe that we are in a measure indispensable; whenever and so far as you can do better, let us go."

The claim of history and its associates to position is second only to that of literature. Literature is potent to form private character and motive; history is potent to direct one's public activities. The public demand for modern history and some knowledge of social science is imperative, and must be met. Our historical courses must be organized with a view to an understanding of the present in the light of the past, that our students may mold the future. I am of the opinion that in some courses advanced mathematics must yield somewhat to the claims of the history group.

As to science, it is the complement of mathematics. Of the three lines of scientific investigation at least two should be represented. As in the case of mathematics, no other group is an equivalent.

I deem it remarkable that the Committee of Ten, whose report has done so much to enlarge our secondary horizon, did not *mention* the industrial arts; for in my judgment they have special significance in education. All the groups represent work—mental effort—but the industrial group represents work which is a combination of mental and muscular effort, joined for the production of material utility. No amount of play, muscular effort in the form of athletics, invaluable for health and disposition, has the effect on character that is exerted by intelligent productive labor. One reason why farm-bred boys and boys familiar with mechanics have made much of their scholastic advantages, is that the industrial factor has been active in their education. One reason why town-bred students of capable parentage and

of excellent scholastic attainments often appear to lack faculty is that they have not engaged in productive labor. Far from labor being a curse, it would seem that a certain stability, power of will, and practical understanding of society can hardly be had in any other way than that of useful bodily toil. The industrial arts in the school are not a full equivalent for the same arts out of school; but their introduction, which is as yet a mere beginning, is founded on sound philosophy, and they have come to stay. Another argument of equal cogency may be advanced. The rift in American society is annually widening. Contempt for labor—inexcusable, unpardonable, suicidal—I say suicidal, because families of leisure soon run out—has been met by envy passing into bitterness of heart, an unseemly, uninformed, destructive dislike for those who have escaped from toil. Say cheerily at nightfall to a strong, healthy man with a dinner pail, as I lately endeavored to do, “Well, sir, you appear to have done a good day’s work,” and he will reply in no affable tone: “That’s not the worst of it; I’ve a great many more to do yet.”

The industrial arts should not be placed in all courses; they are not needed in all schools; but they should not, as is often the case, be set off in a separate building. They should be an integral part of our secondary curriculum. They should be a part of some one course. They cannot do everything, but when a school learns to take the youth’s workaday apron and the miss’s workaday cap as matters of course in the school building; when intelligence of eye and skill of hand are recognized by school authorities; when the spirit of scholarship pervades the shops and studios, and the healthful spirit of useful labor pervades other departments, all learn to look with enlightened respect upon work and workers, and the industrial arts take their natural place among the humanistic subjects.

It is not necessary in my judgment that all groups be given equal place, or that all be represented in a single course of study. School life is not the only education. One of the keenest readers of science and history in my acquaintance was educated on languages and mathematics. It is not unusual to find the graduate of an engineering course delightfully conversant with the best literature. But we do need to understand that each group has its own value, and that our courses should be framed accordingly. All the groups give information, discipline, and culture, but each group has a particular service to perform. Language opens the door, mathematics gives rude strength



and capacity, and science gives method of thought; but literature, history, and, I add, the industrial arts, give attitude, push, and judgment in the conduct of life.

As to time limits, length of course comes first for consideration. Four years is traditional and fairly well established in most parts of the country, but with no scientific reason for the location of either terminus. The upper grammar grades should be added to the high school. Then something should be done to lessen the jolt of transition. I am in favor of stronger grammar-school work in literature, American history, and those principles of English grammar common to all literary languages, in preference to an earlier introduction of secondary subjects. The other end of our curriculum might well be extended. Our stronger institutions of higher education are becoming quite large enough, and it is desirable to encourage by state subsidy the addition of two years in our large secondary schools, in order that local centers may be built up, and many young people be kept nearer home until they are ready to enter the junior year of the university.

No psychological principle has yet determined the number of subjects a student may carry at one time. Experience and common sense must decide. I have already said that the single course of a small school should contain as many subjects as the corresponding course of a large school. Put the other way, the multiplication of facilities and instructors in a large school is no reason for crowding an additional number of subjects into any one course. Simplicity, frugality, digestion, elbowroom are the rules of mental health. Nor is a choppy programme of one subject twice a week and something else three times a week the best plan. It is thought by some that if lessons, in history for example, are separated by a sufficient interval, assimilation is more complete. I think this is true if intervening lessons are not given in some other subject. So far as I am able to see, irregularity of daily programme begets irregularity of preparation, gives occasion for loquacity of instruction, and entails a series of what are known to disheartened teachers as "Monday lessons."

The pressure of many subjects for place in each course originates in a laudable affection for each, and a desire that all the subject groups be largely represented. I am satisfied that the next notable step in secondary work will aim to satisfy this desire by merging what are now regarded and taught as distinct and too often unrelated subjects. English literature, composition and rhetoric will be blended; history,

political economy, social science and civics will, for secondary schools, be made one continuous subject. The distinction between real and nominal wages will be made in terms of the Athenian obolus as well as of the American dollar. Algebra and geometry will not be separated, and other combinations will be formed, reducing greatly a pressure that will increase instead of decrease until the problem is solved in the way I have indicated.

In contending that each serious subject should appear in the programme daily, I also hold that each subject accorded a place should hold its position for not less than a full year. As a basis, let us say, a unit of secondary work is one of not to exceed three solid subjects, given five times a week for one school year.

Venturing on the doubtful and dangerous ground of a specific single course, a course for a village situated within the influence of this university, with suitable library and laboratory facilities for a small enrollment, I would say, bearing in mind conditions of instruction as they now are, that the following is a suitable course of study :

1. A daily exercise in English for four years, combining the language and the literature, but not calling for severe or extended outside work, to count as two credits.
2. A daily exercise in Latin for four years, contributing largely to the English, to count as four credits.
3. Three to four exercises a week in history and allied subjects, enlarged by library work, for two years, say the second and third, to count as two credits.
4. Three to four exercises a week in science, enlarged by laboratory work for three years, say first, third, and fourth, to count as three credits.
5. A daily exercise in mathematics for three years, say first, second and fourth, to count as three credits. Total fourteen credits.

I do not, as I have said, value so highly the third year of mathematics, and would be willing to have students give additional time to intensive work chosen from other groups, as grammar and American history.

If you ask me why not less mathematics, less science, and more language, I offer no objection; I only insist that you take out as much as you put in. I believe that the course submitted is frugal and nutritious ; that it fits for advanced study and for immediate participation in society, and I believe it is a course that a small but intelligent community will stand to.

In all these considerations I have been painfully aware that opinion

is our chief reliance. One can hardly foresee future conditions. The time may come when the family and the community will teach, at least I hope so, much of what is now delegated to the school. It may at that time be the better policy to address school education more exclusively to the intellect, but at the present day, in the present state of society, much as is the need of extended and well-ordered knowledge we are in greater need of strong and well-directed wills.

For the present, the secondary curriculum should give the greater prominence to humanitarian subjects. Science and the humanities must indeed go together. Knowledge and wisdom must go hand in hand :

“ Who loves not knowledge, who shall fix  
Her pillars ?” But, “ Let her know her place.  
She is the second, not the first.”